

The Winning of a D. C. M.

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Mr. Empey's Experiences During His Seventeen Months in the First Line Trenches in France

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Our gun's crew, as was its wont, was sitting on the straw in the corner of our billet, far from the rest of the section. The previous night we had been relieved from the fire trench, and were "resting" in rest billets. Our "day's rest" had been occupied in digging a "bombing" trench, this trench to be used for the purpose of breaking in would-be bombers.

Hungry Foxcroft was slicing away at a huge loaf of bread, while on his knee he was balancing a piece of "issue" cheese. His jack-knife was pretty dull and the bread was hard, so every now and then he would pause in his cutting operation to take a large bite from the cheese.

Curly Wallace whispered to me: "Three bob to a tanner, Yank, that he eats the cheese before he finishes slicing that rooty."

I whispered back: "Nothing doing, Curly, you are Scotch, and did you ever see a Scotsman bet on anything unless it was a sure winner?"

He answered in an undertone: "Well, let's make it a pack of fags. How about it, Yank?"

I acquiesced. (Curly won the fags.)

Sailor Bill was sitting next to Curly, and had our mascot, Jim—a sorry-looking mutt—between his knees, and was picking hard pieces of mud from its paws. Jim was wagging his stump of a tail and was intently watching Hungry's operation on the bread. Every time Hungry reached for the cheese Jim would follow the movement with his eyes, and his tail would wag faster. Hungry, noting this look, bit off a small piece of the cheese and flipped it in Jim's direction. Jim deftly caught it in his mouth and then the fun began. Our mascot hated cheese. It was fun to see him spit it out and sneeze.

Ikey Honney reached over, took the candle, and started searching in his pack, amidst a chorus of growls from us at his rudeness in thus depriving us of light. I was watching him closely and suspected what was coming. Sure enough, out came that harmonica and I knew it was up to me to start the ball of conversation rolling before he began playing, because, after he had once started, nothing short of a German "five-nine" shellburst would stop him. So I stily kicked Sailor Bill, who immediately got wise, and then I broke the ice with:

"Sailor, I heard you say this afternoon, while we were building that traverse, that it was your opinion that darn few medals were really won; that it was more or less an accident. Now, just because your D. C. M. came up with the ration, and, as you say, it was wished on you, there is no reason in my mind to class every winner of a medal as being 'accidentally lucky.'"

"This medal business was a sore point with Sailor Bill, and he came right back at me with:

"Well, if any of you lubbers can tell me where a D. C. M. truly came aboard in a shipshape manner—that is, up the after gangplank—then I will strike my colors and lay up on a lee shore for drydock."

Ikey Honney had just taken a long, indrawn breath, and his cheeks were puffed out like a balloon, preparatory to blowing it into the harmonica, which he had at his lips, but paused, and, removing the musical instrument of torture, he exploded:

"Blime me, I know of a bloke who won a D. C. M., and it wasn't accidental or lucky, either. I was right out in front with him. Blime me, I sure had the wind up, but with French it was 'business as usual.' He just carried on."

We all chirped in, "Come on, Ikey, let's have the story."

"I will if you'll just let me play this one tune first," answered Ikey.

He started in and was accompanied by a dismal, moaning howl from Jim. They had been playing about a minute, when the orderly sergeant poked his head in the door of the billet, saying: "The captain says to stop that infernal noise."

Highly incensed, they stopped, with: "Some people 'ave no idea of music."

We agreed with him.

Somewhat mollified, he started: "Corporal French is the same bloke who just returned from Blighty and joined the Third section yesterday."

(Author's Note—This incident here related is a true happening. Corporal French won the D. C. M. in the manner described by Honney. I will not attempt to give it in the cockney dialect.)

"We were holding a part of the line up Fromelles '17, and were about two hundred yards from the Germans. This was a 'hot' section of the line. We were against the Prussians, and it was a case, at night, of keeping your ears and eyes open. No Man's land was full of their patrols and ours,

and many fights took place between them.

"One night we would send over a trench-raiding party and the next night over would come Fritz.

"There was a certain part of our trench nicknamed Death alley, and the company which held it was sure to click it hard in casualties. In five nights 'in' I clicked for three reconnoitering patrols.

"John French—he was a lance corporal then—was in charge of our section. This was before I went to machine gunners' school and transferred to this outfit. This French certainly was an artist when it came to scouting in No Man's land. He knew every lach of the ground out in front, and was like a cat—he could see in the dark.

"On the night that he won his D. C. M. he had been out 'in front with a patrol for two hours, and had just returned to the fire trench. A sentry down on the right of Death alley reported a suspicious noise out in front, and our captain gave orders for another patrol to go out and investigate.

"Corporal Hawkins was next on the list for the job, but, blime me, he sure had the wind up, and was shaking and trembling like a dish of jelly.

"A new lieutenant, Newall by name, had just come out from Blighty, and a pretty fine officer, too. Now, don't you chaps think because this chap was killed that I say he was a good officer, because, dead or alive, you would have to go a bloomin' long way to get another man like Newall. But this young lieutenant was all eagerness to get out in front. You see, it was his first time over the top. He noticed that Hawkins was shaky, and so did French. French went up to the officer and said:

"Sir, Corporal Hawkins has been feeling queer for the last couple of days, and I would deem it a favor if I could go in his place."

"Now, don't think that Hawkins was a coward, because he was not, for the best of us are liable to get the 'shakes' at times. You know, Hawkins was killed at La Basse a couple of months ago—killed while going over the top.

"There were seven in this patrol—Lieutenant Newall, Corporal French, myself and four more from B company.

"About sixty yards from Fritz's trench an old ditch—must have been the bed of a creek, but at that time was dry—ran parallel with the German barbed wire. Lining the edge of this ditch was a scrubby sort of hedge which made a fine hiding place for a patrol. Why Fritz had not sent out a working party and done away with this screen was a mystery to us.

"French leading, followed by Lieutenant Newall, myself third, and the rest trailing behind, we crawled through a sap under our barbed wire leading out to a listening post in No Man's land. We each had three bombs. Newall carried a revolver—one of those Yankee Colts—and his cane. Blime me, I believe that officer slept with that cane. He never went without it. The rest of us were armed with bombs and rifles, bayonets fixed. We had previously blackened our bayonets so they would not shine in the glare of a star shell.

"Reaching the listening post French told us to wait about five minutes until he returned from a little scouting trip of his own. When he left, we, with every nerve tense, listened for his coming back. We could almost hear each other's hearts pumping, but not a sound around the listening post. Suddily a voice, about six feet on my right whispered: 'All right the way is clear; follow me and carry on.'

"My blood froze in my veins. It was uncanny the way French approached us without being heard.

"Then, with backs bending low, out of the listening post we went, in the direction of the ditch in front of the German barbed wire. We reached the scrubby hedge and lay down, about six feet apart, to listen. French and the officer were on the right of our line.

About twenty minutes had elapsed when suddenly, directly in front of the German wire we could see dark, shadowy forms rise from the ground and move along the wire. Silhouetted against the skyline these forms looked like huge giants, and took on horrible shapes. My heart almost stopped beating. I counted sixty-two in all, as the last form faded into the blackness on my left.

"A whisper came to my ears: 'Don't move or make a sound, a strong German raiding party is going across.' It was French's voice. I did not hear him approach me, nor leave. Yank, he must have got his training with the Indians on your great plains of America!

"I could hear a slight scraping noise on my right and left. Pretty soon the whole reconnoitering patrol was lying in a circle, heads in. French had,

in his noiseless way, given orders for them to close in on me, and await instructions.

"Lieutenant Newall's voice, in a very low whisper, came to us:

"Boys, the men in our trenches have received orders not to fire on account of our reconnoitering patrol being out in front. A strong German raiding party has just circled our left, and is making for our trench. It's up to us to send word back. We can't all go, because we might make too much noise and warn the German party, so it's up to one of us to carry the news back to the trench that the raiding party is on its way. With this information it will be quite easy for our boys to wipe them out. But its up to the rest of us to stick out here, and if we go west we have done our duty in a noble cause. Corporal French, you had better take the news back, because you are too valuable a man to sacrifice."

"French, under his breath, answered: 'Sir, I've been out since Mons, and this is the first time that I've ever been insulted by an officer. If this patrol is going to click it, I'm going to click it too. If we come out of this you can try me for disobedience of orders, but here I stick, and I'll be damned if I go in, officer or no officer.'

"Newall, in a voice husky with emotion, answered: 'French, it's men like you that make it possible for "our Little Island" to withstand the world. You are a true Briton, and I'm proud of you.' "I was hoping that he would tell me to go back, but he didn't. Henderson was picked for the job. When Henderson left Newall shook hands all around. I felt queer and lonely.

"You see, fellows, it was this way: Henderson was to tell the men in the trench that we had returned and that it was all right for them to turn loose on the raiding party with their rifle and machine gunfire, without us clicking their fire. Lieutenant Newall sure was a lad, not 'arf he weren't."

"That next twenty minutes of waiting was hell. Then, from out of the blackness, over toward our trench, rang that old familiar 'Alt, who goes there? We hugged the ground. We knew what was coming. Then, a volley from our trench, and four 'type-writers' (machine guns) turned loose. Bullets cracked right over our heads. One hit the ground about a foot from me, ricocheted, and went moaning and sighing over the German lines.

"Lieutenant Newall sobbed under his breath: "God, we're in direct line of our own fire. The trench-raiding party must have circled us."

"Our boys in our trench sure were doing themselves proud. The bullets were cracking and biting the ground all around us.

"In between our trench and our party, curses rang out in German as the Boches clicked the fire from the English trench. Star shells were shooting into the air and dropping in No Man's land. It was a great but terrible sight which met our eyes. Fritz's raiding party was sure being wiped out.

"Ten or fifteen dark forms, the remnants of the German raiding party, dashed past us in the direction of the German trench. We hugged the ground. It was our only chance. We knew that it would only be a few seconds before Fritz turned loose. If we had legged it for our trench we would have been wiped out by our own fire. You see, our boys thought we were safely in.

"Then, up went Fritz's star lights, turning night into day, and hell out loose. Their bullets were snipping twigs from the hedge over our heads.

"Suddenly the fellow on my left, MacCauley by name, emitted a muffled groan, and started kicking the ground; then silence. He had gone west. A bullet through the napper, I suppose. There were now five of us left.

"Suddenly Lieutenant Newall, in a faint, choking voice, exclaimed: "They've got me, French; it's through the lung, and then fainter—'you're in command. See that—' His voice died away. Pretty soon he started moaning loudly. The Germans must have heard these moans, because they immediately turned their fire on us. French called to me:

"Honney, come here, my lad, our officer has clicked it."

"I crawled over to him. He was sitting on the ground with the lieutenant's head resting in his lap, and was getting out his first-aid packet. I told him to get low or he would click it. He answered:

"Since when does a bloomin' lance corporal take orders from a bloody private? You tell the rest of the boys, if they're not as yet gone west, to leg it back to our trench at the double and get a stretcher, and you go with them. This lad of ours has got to get medical attention, and damned quick, too, if we want to stop this bleeding!"

"Just then a German star shell landed about ten feet from us, and in its white, ghostly light I could see French sitting like a bloomin' statue, his hands covered with blood, trying to make a tourniquet out of a bandage and his bayonet.

"I told the rest to get in and get the stretcher. They needed no second urging, and soon French was left there alone, sitting on the ground, holding his dying officer's head in his lap. A pretty picture, I call it. He sure was a man, was French—with the bullets cracking overhead and kicking up the dirt around him."

Just then Happy butted in with: "Were you one of the men who went in for the stretcher?"

Ikey answered: "None of your d—

business. If you blokes want to hear this story through, don't interrupt."

Happy vouchsafed no answer.

"About ten minutes after the fellows left for the stretcher, French got a bullet through the left arm."

Sailor Bill interrupted here: "How do you know it was ten minutes?"

Ikey blushed and answered: "French told me when he got back to the trench. You see, he carried the officer back through that fire, because the stretcher bearers took too long in coming out."

I asked Ikey how Corporal French, being wounded himself, could carry Lieutenant Newall in, because I knew Lieutenant Newall to be a six-footer and no lightweight. You see, he had at one time been in command of my platoon at the training depot in England.

Ikey answered: "Well, you blokes give me the proper pip, and you can all bloomin' well go to h—," and he shut up like a clam.

Hungry Foxcroft got up and silently withdrew from our circle. In about ten minutes he returned, followed by a tall, fair-haired corporal who wore a little strip of gold braid on the left sleeve of his tunic, denoting that he had been once wounded, and also wore a little blue and red ribbon on the left breast of his tunic, the field insignia of the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Hungry, in triumph, brought him into our circle and handed him a flag, which he lighted in the flame from the candle on the mess tin, and then Hungry introduced him to us:

"Boys, I want you to meet Corporal French."

He shook hands with all the boys. Ikey got red and was trying to ease out of the candle light, when Sailor



Holding His Dying Officer's Head.

Bill grabbed him by the tunic and held him.

Then Hungry Foxcroft carried on: "French, I'm going to ask you a mighty personal question, and I know you'll answer it. How in h— did you, hit in the left arm, bring Lieutenant Newall back from that reconnoitering patrol?"

French grew a little red, and answered: "Well, you see, boys, it was this way. Honney and I stuck out there with him, and, taking the slings from our rifles, Honney made a sort of rope which he put around my shoulder and under the arm of the lieutenant, and Honney, getting the lieutenant by the legs, we managed to get him into the trench. You know, I got a D. C. M. out of the affair, because I was the corporal in charge. Damned unfair, I call it, because they only handed Honney the Military medal, but if the true facts were known he was the bloke who deserved, not a D. C. M., but a V. C. (Victoria Cross)."

All turned in Honney's direction. Bill, in his interest, had released his hold on Honney's tunic and Honney had disappeared.

Happy asked French if the lieutenant had died in No Man's land.

French, with tears in his eyes, answered: "No, but the poor lad went west after we got him to the first-aid dressing station, and next day we buried him in the little cemetery at Fromelles. He sure done his bit, all right, blime me, and here I am, bloomin' well swankin' with a ribbon on my chest."

A dead silence fell on the crowd. Each one of us was admiring the modesty of those two real men, French and Honney.

But such is the way in the English army—the man who wins the medal always says that the other fellow deserved it.

And Germany is still wondering why they cannot smash through the English lines.

Canterbury's Famous Ghost.

Of course, Canterbury cathedral has its ghosts. If rumor be true the ghost of the murdered Thomas a Becket is periodically to be seen engaged in that last deadly struggle of his with the four miscreant knights at the foot of the altar, and groans and other queer noises are reputed to be heard on the anniversary of his death. The crime was committed on December 29, 1170, and the stains of his blood are believed to be in evidence; no amount of washing ever having effaced them.—Pearson's Weekly.

True Education.

Education is not learning; it is the exercise and development of the powers of the mind. There are two great methods by which this end may be accomplished; it may be done in the halls of learning or in the conflicts of life.—Princeton Review.

GERMANY MUST PAY

Nation Will Never Be Able to Make Amends for Damage.

FERTILE SOIL IS DESTROYED

Innumerable Unexploded Shells Will Make Cultivation Precarious—Doubtful if Land Can Be Reclaimed.

By WRIGHT A. PATTERSON.

What must Germany pay for? That question can be adequately answered only when it is remembered that Germany started the terrible conflict in Europe for no reason other than that of conquest and loot; started it only to satisfy the selfish ambitions of a selfish people for world domination. That is being admitted today by what is left of the German nation; it is admitted by those who were directly responsible for the war.

And it is because Germany started this conflict for no reason other than that of conquest and loot that Germany owes to the world full payment for all the devastation which the war has brought, not only in so far as she can pay now, but in so far as she can pay for generations yet to come.

Among the many, many sections of Belgium and northern France that I personally covered, following closely on the heels of the retreating Hun army, was that which lies between what were the cities of Ypres and Menin, approximately 20 miles apart. Here, before the coming of the invading Boche, was what was considered the most productive soil of the world, and the most intensely cultivated. Here in a number of farm villages lived the Belgian peasant families, happy, thrifty people, each family cultivating the small fields which it owned. No fences separated these fields, no hedges cut them off from the

roadways, and the families that cultivated the fields lived not on the little farms but in closely built villages of from 100 to 500 people each.

Devastation is Complete.

It is hard to realize today that these villages ever existed, that the land along this long, straight road was ever cultivated, ever produced foodstuffs for a people. In fact, it is hard to realize today that this was ever an inhabited country.

Of these peaceful villages, the living places of these farm people, there is no trace left. There are not even piles of debris, of broken brick and stone and lumber, to mark the spots where they stood. There is no single thing by which the returning peasants, weary by dragging themselves back to that spot which had been home to them and to their ancestors for almost countless generations, can mark the place where not only their home but their village had stood.

I have seen old men and women, weary by four long years of exile, stand beside this road and gaze longingly over the devastated landscape, in an effort to locate some familiar object that would remind them of the spot they had known all their lives, and then turn away with tears on their cheeks because they could not find even one small object that would tell them of the homes, the only homes, they had known.

It was German ambition, German cruelty, German lust, German wantonness, German brutality, that were the cause of the destruction of these homes, of the agonies of a peaceful, thrifty people.

What can possibly compensate these people for their loss, for the misery they have suffered and must still suffer, for the homes and the associations that are gone forever? No, Germany can never pay in full, but she can continue to pay and pay and pay until there has been bred out of the German people that desire for war, that love of conquest, that brutality, that it has taken centuries, almost, to breed into them, and which has resulted in laying a whole world waste.

In all that 20 miles between Ypres

and Menin, on both sides of that long, straight road, I am sure I did not see one square foot of soil that was not a part of a shell crater. What had once been the richest soil of the world is today but a waste, made so by the shells that fell upon it because Germany sought world domination. This soil has been destroyed by countless thousands of shells falling actually one upon another, each digging deeper into the earth until the very subsoil has been turned over and the land made worthless for cultivation for years to come, if indeed it can ever be reclaimed.

Unexploded Shells Buried in Soil.

There lie today on the surface of this land many thousands of unexploded shells, and there are buried in the soil many, many thousands more, each one of them a menace to any farmer who attempts to put a plow into the soil in an effort to reclaim it.

And this land is destroyed, as the homes were destroyed, because of German ambition, of German cruelty, of German lust, of German wantonness and German brutality.

Who is to pay for it? Who is to risk destruction that it may again be put into condition for cultivation, that it may serve the purposes of the human race? Shall the peaceful Belgian peasants, who had no part in the starting of this conflict, suffer their loss without compensation? Shall these peasants who have endured more than four long years of homeless agonies, who have suffered not alone the loss of homes and land but the loss of relatives and friends as well, be the ones to risk destruction in the effort to again bring these lands back to a condition where cultivation is possible? Shall they be blown to bits by the bursting of these shells, hidden as they are beneath the surface of the ground, when the plow strikes and explodes them? If undisturbed, those shells continue to be a menace for years to come, but who are to risk their lives in removing them?

Could the American people generally, and especially the American farmers, have seen the sights I have seen



Ground Pulverized by Bursting of Big Shells.



Jim Was Wagging His Stump of a Tail and Watching Intently.